

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 0084

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CI

SUBJ: GENERAL ARELLANO RETIRED

REFA. 75 SANTIAGO 7989; B.SANTIAGO 0061

1. SUMMARY: ARMY ANNOUNCED RETIREMENT OF GENERAL SERGIO ARELLANO STARK JANUARY 2. ARELLANO HAS BEEN WIDELY REGARDED AS ONLY ARMY GENERAL WITH PERSONAL QUALITIES, CHARISMA, AND FOLLOWING IN SERVICE TO PRESENT CLEAR ALTERNATIVE TO PRESIDENT, GENERAL PINOCHET. CONTRARY TO ARMY ANNOUNCEMENT, RETIREMENT IS ESSENTIALLY INVOLUNTARY AND THERE IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE SURPRISE IN ARMY AND CONCERN IN SOME CIRCLES OVER ARELLANO DISMISSAL AS ONE MORE INDICATION OF PINOCHET'S GROWING PERSONAL POWER. END SUMMARY.

2. IN PRESS BRIEF BULLETIN ISSUED JANUARY 2, CHILEAN ARMY PUBLIC RELATIONS ANNOUNCED "VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT" OF MAJOR GENERAL (GENERAL DE DIVISION) ARELLANO, WHOSE CURRENT ASSIGNMENT WAS A CHIEF OF NATIONAL DEFENSE STAFF. NO NEW POSITION IN GOC FOR ARELLANO WAS ANNOUNCED. VACANCY IN MAJOR GENERAL RANKS WAS FILLED IN SAME ANNOUNCEMENT BY PROMOTION OF BRIGADIER GENERAL WASHINGTON CARRASCO FERNANDEZ, WHO WILL REMAIN AT LEAST TEMPORARILY AS COMMANDER FIFTH DIVISION BASED
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IN PUNTA ARENAS.

3. LEADING NEWSPAPER "EL MERCURIO" SURFACED FOR FIRST TIME WIDELY RUMORED STORY OF PINOCHET/ARELLANO CONFRONTATION. "MERCURIO" SUPPLEMENTED OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT WITH OBSERVATION THAT PRESIDENT PINOCHET LAST OCTOBER HAD OFFERED ARELLANO POSTING AS AMBASSADOR TO SPAIN, WHICH ARELLANO REFUSED. "MERCURIO" WENT ON TO NOTE THAT "SOME DAYS LATER" PINOCHET HAD ASKED ARELLANO TO RETIRE, A REQUEST TO WHICH ARELLANO ACCEDED "WITHIN TWO HOURS." NOW HIS RETIREMENT HAS BEEN ACCEPTED. ACCORDING TO PRESS, ARELLANO IS TO CONTINUE TO PRESENT POST UNTIL SUCCESSOR NAMED.

4. COMMENT: ARELLANO HAD BEEN WIDELY REGARDED AS ONE OF TOP CANDIDATES TO BE FUTURE ARMY CINC. ARELLANO IS FORCEFUL OFFICER, RESPECTED BY SENIOR OFFICERS OF HIS SERVICE, AND HIGHLY REGARDED BY LEADERS OF OTHER SERVICES. IN EARLY POST-COUP PERIOD, HE HAD BEEN A CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE IN HUMAN RIGHTS AREA, BUT ON OTHER HAND WAS CONSIDERED ONE OF ARMY GENERALS WITH MEASURE OF RESPECT FROM AND CONTACT WITH DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL CRITICS OF GOC SUCH AS CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS.

5. IT IS TOO EARLY TO JUDGE COMPLETELY REACTION TO ARELLANO'S FALL, BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT THERE IS MUCH DISCUSSION AND SPECULATION IN MILITARY CIRCLES. THERE IS ALSO CONSIDERABLE SURPRISE, BECAUSE AS LATE AS JANUARY 2 SOURCES CLOSE TO ARELLANO WERE SAYING THAT HE HAD BEEN CONFIRMED IN HIS JOB AND ALL WAS WELL. EMBASSY HEARD JANUARY 5 THAT ARELLANO WAS RECENTLY OFFERED POSITION AS AMBASSADOR TO BOLIVIA, WHICH HE ALSO REJECTED. THIS MAY HAVE TRIGGERED RETIREMENT ACTION.

6. ARELLANO'S SUPPORTERS AND ADMIRERS WILL OBVIOUSLY BE UNHAPPY OVER DEVELOPMENT. IT IS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT ANYTHING WILL COME OF IT IN SHORT RUN AT LEAST. IT IS AXIOM IN CHILEAN ARMY THAT OFFICERS LOSE INFLUENCE ONCE OUT OF ACTIVE DUTY RANKS. EMBASSY EXPECTS GRUMBLING BUT NO DIRECT EFFORT TO PROTECT ARELLANO OR MOVE AGAINST PINOCHET.

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7. ARELLANO APPEARS LIKELY TO ACCEPT PERSONAL DEFEAT LIKE GOOD SOLDIER THAT HE IS. SOURCES REPORT TO US THAT HE IS UPSET OVER WAY STORY IS BEING PLAYED IN INTERNATIONAL PRESS AND BELIEVES IT CAN ONLY DAMAGE CHILE'S IMAGE. TO EXTENT THAT HE HAS BEEN LOOKED UPON AS POTENTIAL REPLACEMENT FOR PINOCHET, THOSE UNHAPPY WITH PINOCHET'S PERFORMANCE IN OFFICE WILL PROBABLY FEEL THEY HAVE SUFFERED A SETBACK IN MOVING TOWARD

SUCH A CHANGE. MALCONTENTS IN MILITARY RANKS WILL NOW
HAVE TO LOOK ELSEWHERE FOR ALTERNATIVES. PINOCHET HAS
GAINED AT LEAST A TEMPORARY ADVANTAGE, IN A SITUATION
WHICH WAS NEVER AS DEEPLY STRAINED AS INTERNATIONAL
PRESS HAD SUGGESTED.
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